

The Orange County Register
Area transportation gets an 'F'

Southern California group releases annual report.

By Ellyn Pak

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Mom wouldn't want to tack this report card on her fridge.

Regional representatives from six counties unveiled [a report card](#) Thursday that flunked Southern California's transportation performance.

Mobility dropped from a D-minus in 2003 fiscal year to an F in 2004. Air quality and income saw slight improvement to C; housing and education stayed level at D, while employment and safety remained at B.

"It's a sense of frustration among the group," said Debbie Cook, a Huntington Beach councilwoman and member of the Southern California Association of Governments committee that produced the report.

"Transportation needed to have an F this year and maybe get the attention of everybody."

The lone failing grade went to transportation in a region clogged with the worst congestion in the nation.

Population growth, automobile dependence, a lack of transit use and a highway system with few options to expand exacerbate the congestion, according to the report.

Some reasons for the poor mark:

The region has been the most congested in the nation for decades.

Commuters in Orange and Los Angeles counties spend about 93 hours a year in traffic. Riverside and San Bernardino commuters spend about 55 hours.

In 2003, congestion caused about \$12 billion in losses.

Between 2000 and 2004, car-pooling rates dropped 3 percent and solo commuting rates increased. About 11 percent of commuters car-pooled in 2004.

In 2004, there were 1,822 traffic fatalities in the region; 215 died in Orange County.

Mass-transit boardings in the region fell 2 percent from 2003 to 2004, from 649 million to 633 million. The report blamed a labor strike in Los Angeles, the car culture and spotty service for the decline.

Orange County commuters saw their daily commute increase about a minute and a half, from 25.6 minutes to 27.

"It's like a class," said Marlon Boarnet, a planning, policy, design and economics professor at UC Irvine. "A few students are doing good work. But if there was a group project, it wouldn't come together."

Cities, interest groups and transportation agencies have yet to figure how to work together, exacerbating the problem, Boarnet said.

Some consider the report too harsh, including Newport Beach resident Fred Ferketic, 63.

"The transportation structure and the road system is as good as any. You can get anywhere from here to there except during heavy, peak rush hours. To give transportation an F – what are we comparing? Country roads in Northern California?" he said.

A similar report released in October cut Orange County a bit more slack.

The local branch of the American Society of Civil Engineers and the UC Irvine Civil & Environmental Engineering Affiliates gave transportation in the county a C-plus, citing the success of the Measure M half-cent sales tax that has helped fund new projects such as the current widening of the Garden Grove (22) Freeway.

If extended, the measure could raise \$11.8 billion and fund future projects, including a \$2.2 billion plan to expand Metrolink services.

Tammi Harrington, a Fullerton resident who has commuted to Los Angeles for 20 years, said commuters need simple yet multiple options.

"There's a lot of road construction. But the amount of cars on the road are surpassing the availability of the road. What I don't see is the public transit," she said.

Mark Pisano, the association's executive director, said building mixed-use developments and units around transportation depots and securing funds for future projects could help.

"In terms of what we're going to do, there's no silver bullet," he said.